

In Reply Refer To:

6500 (930) P

July 29, 1999

Information Bulletin No. WY-99-71

To: Field Managers

From: State Director

Subject: Initial Solicitation of Feedback on the Discussions of the Fire/Wildlife WorkgroupDD 9/3/99

On March 31, 1999, the Director and selected headquarters staff of the Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) met in Cheyenne with the Wyoming management team and selected staff of the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) for a periodic, State-level, coordination meeting.

One topic of discussion at this meeting centered around differing viewpoints on the use of fire as a management tool for improving habitat for wildlife species, such as sage grouse. A decision was made by the directors of each agency to form a joint working group to discuss these differences of opinion, and explore any potential solutions to these differences and improvements or efficiencies to our respective resource management efforts. The direct charge to the joint working group was to discuss prescribed burning, the reintroduction of fire, and the effect of these activities on various wildlife species. It was further directed that the U.S. Forest Service (FS) and the U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) be invited to participate in these discussions. Gary Butler (WGFD) and Dave Roberts (BLM) were assigned the co-lead in forming the joint working group.

At an initial, formative meeting on May 5, 1999, it was decided a small, core group of wildlife and fire specialists should start these discussions by reconnoitering the situation and specifically defining the task of this assignment. Gary Butler (wildlife) and Mark Fowden (fisheries) were to represent the WGFD; Dave Roberts (wildlife) and Ken Stinson (range/fire) would represent the BLM; Dave Sisk (R2-FMO) and Rod Dykehouse (R4-FMO) represented the FS; and Dick Rintamaki (wildlife) would represent the NRCS. As discussions proceeded and something tangible was developed to react to, a wider cast would be made of managers and staff for their input and review of the group efforts. The group has reached the point where they need your input.

Background

The group met twice this summer. After some discussion of the charge to the group, it was a consensus conclusion that the topic of fire management, and the lack of any management guidelines for fire was probably not the source of any significant differences of viewpoint among the agencies. There are many references regarding how to start, manage, combat, and suppress wild and prescribed fires. There are also many opinions about how to manage various species of wildlife. In a State as ecologically diverse as Wyoming, it would likely be difficult to create a set of fire management guidelines that could be adopted statewide. Rather, the group felt that the real need is *vegetation manipulation*.

Several existing coordination entities were discussed as a forum for addressing landscape level vegetation manipulations, but it was felt none of these groups were the answer for this type of coordination. The group felt it was appropriate to propose an interagency vegetation manipulation coordinating entity whose main task would be to take a landscape view of vegetation manipulation activities and recommend actions based on that large scale perspective. Some of the identified benefits of taking this coordinated, interagency approach include:

1. The airing of broad, landscape level viewpoints.
2. An opportunity to exercise economies of scale (i.e., shared manpower, costs, contracts, etc.).
3. Guidelines based on ecological considerations.
4. Consistent recording and tracking system for projects.
5. Consistent response to existing and new guidelines.
6. Promotion of monitoring and evaluation.

Recommendation

Establish a two-tier vegetation manipulation coordinating structure to bring the landscape prospective to the planning of these types of activities similar in organization to the grizzly bear and brucellosis committees as follows:

1. The first tier would be one of four or more **local groups** (see attached map) who would meet no less than once a year to review and coordinate all the vegetation manipulation projects proposed for their geographic area to gauge their appropriateness on a landscape scale. The local groups would be interagency made up of representatives of the following entities as appropriate for their geographic area: WGFD; FS; BLM; NRCS/Cons. Distr.; and others (e.g., BOR, NPS, FWS, WSLB, etc.) as needed. The local group should be comprised of knowledgeable people of mixed disciplines and line management with representative expertise in at least fire management/planning, wildlife/fisheries biology, ecology, range management, and other disciplines as appropriate. The exact makeup of the group would be left to the participating entities. The major mission/duties of the local group would be as follows:

- a. Recording and tracking of cumulative treatments in their area (e.g., Arc View).
- b. Coordination, planning, and monitoring of large scale treatments by vegetation type.
- c. Coordination and assistance with administration (e.g., contracting, personnel, cost sharing, etc.).
- d. Discussion and resolution of emerging issues (e.g., T&E, smoke management, etc.).
- e. Response to State/national level directives and guidelines (i.e., development and feedback).
- f. Information sharing on floral and faunal communities (e.g., plant and animal monitoring techniques, etc.).

2. The second tier would be a **State-level group** with a similar make-up and organizational structure as the local groups. The State-level group would have all the same functions as the local groups, although not likely the same emphasis, and a couple of additional duties as follows:

- a. Provide a State-level viewpoint on pertinent issues.
- b. Recommend consistencies of operational approach where such is deemed necessary.
- c. Conceivably, the State-level coordinating group could be a metamorphosis of this exploratory group.

The exploratory group would like some feedback regarding this proposal.

Specifically, they would like to get your answers to the following questions:

1. Have our discussions as stated above evolved in a logical manner, and is our course or direction still in line with the intent of our original charge? If not, how and what should it be?
2. Is the formalized general core group purpose statement appropriate and well enough defined? If not, how should it be stated?
3. What is your impression of the proposal to have a two-tiered vegetation manipulation coordination groups? Can you think of a better approach for getting interagency, landscape level coordination of projects? If so, what is it (please elaborate)?
4. Who do you feel should be involved in the local and State-level coordination groups, and why?
5. What do you think the geographic boundaries should be for the local coordination groups if other than the suggested boundaries of the attached map? Why?

6. Do you agree with the suggested mission/duties of the local and State-level coordination groups? If not, what do you think they should be?
7. What concepts, ideas, and activities do you feel the groups should address, respectively? Should the local and State-level groups develop and issue community and species specific management criteria and/or guidelines?
8. Have we missed some major aspects/issues here that should be addressed by the core group?

Please provide your comments in writing to Dave Roberts in WSO-930 by September 3, 1999. If there are any questions, please contact Dave at 307-775-6099.

/s/Alan R. Pierson

1 Attachment:

1 - Appendix 3 B (1 p.)